DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 471 UD 018 012

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TITLE Responses to the Revolution in the Urban Academic Environment in Higher Education: A Case Study Report -- George Mason University.
PUB DATE 20 Nov 77
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Urban Education (3rd, Norfolk, Virginia, November 20-22, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Case Studies; Change Agents; *Change Strategies; Evening Students; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Masters Degrees; Part Time Students; *Student Needs; Universities
IDENTIFIERS *George Mason University; *Virginia

ABSTRACT

A description of the graduate school of George Mason University, a suburban institution serving about 9,600 students in the urban suburban region of Northern Virginia, is provided in this paper. In the past five years the university has begun to direct its outlook to serve its student body which has become both culturally and intellectually diverse. The university minority population includes a relatively small rural black population, and a somewhat larger urban black population. There are also a significant number of foreign minority students. At the graduate level, George Mason has responded to the needs of the region by introducing master's programs that cater to the needs of graduate students who work full time while studying part time. Graduate programs are offered primarily during the evening hours. In addition, residency requirements, thesis requirements, and full time study requirements are flexible. To accommodate those students who are pursuing full time graduate study, there are graduate courses offered during the day. The most important task facing the university is that of maintaining both flexibility and integrity. This geographical region is one with a high concentration of people who find it important to obtain a master's degree in order to advance professionally. It becomes important, then, that the university accommodate the part time student but retain academic integrity. (Author/AM)

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THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON URBAN EDUCATION

Symposium VIII

RESPONSES TO THE REVOLUTION IN THE URBAN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY REPORT-- GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

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Only fifteen miles from Washington, D. C., George Mason University is a suburban institution serving 9600 students in the urban-suburban region commonly known as Northern Virginia. Viewed as a dynamic model, the Northern Virginia region is slowly evolving outward and westward. The question facing George Mason is how to meet an evolutionary challenge to education corresponding to the evolution of the region which George Mason primarily serves. Fairfax County--sited in the middle of the region--is a good model to examine with regard to the evolution of the area. Most of the severely limited resources for the first fifteen years of the University's growth have been used to build a traditional model in curriculum and physical plant for what might be called the western sector of the county. But in the past five years the University has begun to direct its outlook eastward to consider how better to allocate some portion of its resources to the evolving needs of the eastern sector.

The Northern Virginia region constitutes only 3.2% of the land area of Virginia, but contains about one-fifth of the state's population. Northern Virginia has one of the highest rates of growth in the U. S. Its population--consisting largely of government workers, military personnel, teachers, and

professionals in business, cultural and research organizations--has an exceptionally high level of educational attainment. This creates a high level of demand for graduate study. The annual turnover in this highly mobile population intensifies the demand.

Graduate programs were established in 1971 to respond to this demand. The rate of growth has exceeded 20% annually in each year since then. The current graduate enrollment is over 1200. As most students are employed full-time, the graduate programs have been designed to serve part-time students. The increasing pressure from working professionals for additional credentials has resulted in an increasing professionalization of the master's degree. There are also special needs of minority students, including a growing number of students whose primary language is other than English, which must be met. Minority students comprise 12% of the total graduate enrollment.

In responding to the multiple needs of a diverse urban population, the Graduate School seeks to maintain academic integrity, as well as flexibility. In so doing, it has introduced not only new modes of delivery, but also structural changes and new academic concepts in graduate programs. These have helped meet the varied needs of those who seek meaningful educational opportunities to add value to their personal and professional lives.

During the era of revolution in higher education of the past decade, the arts and sciences program at George Mason has undergone change and revisions, but at the same time has retained the best qualities of any liberal arts and sciences program. This is due to flexibility and a

commitment to responsible innovation. There has been a consistent retention of general degree requirements, experimentation with curriculum, development of interdisciplinary degree programs, innovative efforts in remedial education, and some experimentation in grading. The changes have had a positive impact, with the result being a strengthening of the liberal arts and sciences.

George Mason's urban model for continuing education seeks to make continuing education an integral part of the mission of each unit of the University and to relate the University to the concerns of the greater community in which it exists. George Mason did not develop separate university or evening colleges with their own curricula and faculty. The undergraduate evening session is an extension of the day programs of each of the colleges. The Office of Extended Studies, the continuing education division, acts administratively to assure that nine undergraduate degree programs are completely available in the evening. Professional adult education counselors in the office may enroll non-admitted students in any of the courses offered by the University, undergraduate or graduate, on or off-campus. Off-campus courses (which are fully applicable to residency requirements) are offered at fifteen different sites throughout the region. Conferences, institutes, and workshops are developed by each of the University's departments with the assistance of the Office of Extended Studies to bring University resources to community concerns and needs. As a catalyst, the Office of Extended Studies assures that the University is an active partner with government, business, and civic groups in its urban setting.

The School of Business Administration was established on July 1, 1977, as the first professional school at George Mason. This reflects a recognition that work in business administration provides the type of educational skills which the diverse market described above needs and a commitment by the University to respond to these needs. The major market segments of the service industry of consulting firms and trade associations, financial institutions, real estate, and retailing exist in other communities but not with the dominance they possess in Northern Virginia. Also, there is the lack of any major manufacturing firms which are the strong, traditional source of jobs for graduates from business schools. Overshadowing these segments, and directly influencing the viability of each segment, is the federal government with its agencies, programs, and people. At present, the programs offered in business administration are traditional and the needed matching with specific market segments is just beginning. To prepare a foundation for making appropriate responses to these unique market segments, the School has established a matrix form of organization and a curriculum structure which stresses career focus in terms of majors available to George Mason students and will incorporate public policy into program packages directed towards these specialized market needs.

RESPONSES TO THE REVOLUTION IN THE URBAN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY REPORT

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

(Paper presented by William S. Willis, Dean of the Graduate School, George Mason University, at the Third Annual Conference on Urban Education, sponsored by the Association for Urban Education and held in Norfolk, Virginia, 20-22 November 1977)

Dr. Baxter has set the stage for our presentation, and he has introduced the performers. Before we assume our individual roles, let me add a further word about the audience we serve at George Mason University.

First, I would emphasize that we serve a growing audience. This growth has been in progress since the 1940's, but with a far more rapid growth in the 1960's, when George Mason was created to fill the academic vacuum for the several hundred thousand state residents in the area. In spite of the University's rapid growth since then, we have not yet caught up with the academic needs which the University was designed to serve. Recent projections made by the Division of State Planning and Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Virginia, indicate that by 1980 Northern Virginia's population will be 1,150,000. A decade of growth at the projected rate would add population to our area equal to that of the current population of the City of Richmond. And, as you may know, the metropolitan Washington area is projected to have the highest rate of growth through the 1990's of any metropolitan area in the United States. Although Northern Virginia constitutes a mere 3.2 percent of the land area of Virginia, some 20% of the state's population are already living in that region.

Secondly, I would emphasize that the growth is not occurring evenly throughout Northern Virginia. As a matter of fact, some areas nearest to the City of Washington, notably Alexandria and Arlington, appear not only to have stopped growing, but to have actually begun to lose population. This is due in part to the fact that the base of growth is becoming larger. What were once the suburban areas of Washington

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are now becoming urban areas themselves as commuters move further out, thus creating new suburban communities which in turn become urban areas. In other words, Dr. Baxter's "funnel" metaphor, geographically speaking, is fast becoming a circular one, with George Mason University (once considered in the "boondocks" because it is located at the southern extreme of Fairfax County) now being almost at the center of the circle.

Let me illustrate by one vivid example. If one drew a ten-mile circle around George Mason University, one would find in it the Fairfax County School system with over 6000 public school teachers. A twenty-mile circle would add another 5000 public school teachers in Alexandria and Arlington, and in Loudoun and Prince William counties, making a total of some 11,000 public school teachers. Most of these are potential candidates for graduate programs in Education. Consider an added dimension: there is close to a 30% annual turnover in this school personnel. One can quickly see that the demands for graduate Education courses will not soon be satiated. It is small wonder that George Mason University has seven graduate programs in Education, and that over half our graduate student body is made up of school personnel.

This leads me to the third point I wish to make about our student body -- its cultural and intellectual diversity. Let me underscore here one particular constituency, and that is the minority population. This includes a relatively small rural black population, and a somewhat larger urban black population. There is also a significant number of foreign minority students in our region, notably Korean, Latin-American, and Vietnamese. A recent survey in Fairfax County schools identified over 6000 individuals whose prime language is other than English. In the Alexandria Public Schools alone, there are students from some forty different countries who speak twenty-two different languages. It is not surprising then that the minority enrollment in our Graduate School each semester constitutes about 12% of the total graduate enrollment.

The professional, cultural, and intellectual diversity of our graduate student body is due in large measure of course to our proximity to Washington, which is but sixteen miles from the George Mason campus. If any of you have had the time to read the 21 November edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education, you will have noticed the article referring to Washington as "A New Capital of the Intellect?" The author emphasizes the emerging intellectual environment of Washington and its increasingly international character, pointing to the fact that an impressive number of persons with advanced degrees have already established themselves in Washington's bureaucratic agencies. Many of our graduate students hold positions with the National Endowments, the National Science Foundation, the Congressional Research Service, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery, the Library of Congress and other such facilities. A sizeable group of our students are in military service, while many work for such corporations as IBM and Xerox, or with banks or other enterprises, including their own.

It is not my aim to impress you by statistics or by the caliber of positions held by our graduate students. It is rather to give you an insight into the diverse nature of our particular urban, or, if you will, sub-urban environment. When speaking of urban education, one equates it too often perhaps with the ghetto or the disadvantaged The dimensions of urban education, I submit, are much more vast, and much more complex.

Consider, for instance, the fact that the residents of Fairfax County have among the highest, if not the highest, levels of educational attainment in the United States. As already implied, this is due largely to the fact that most of the residents are government workers, military personnel, teachers, or professionals in business, cultural, and research organizations. Because they have already attained a relatively high degree of education, they are generally interested in continuing their academic pursuits. And their children are usually motivated to do likewise. Moreover, this urban population is an unusually mobile one. The turnover intensifies the demands placed upon the University to serve a diverse constituency.

So far I have spoken mainly about the population to which George Mason University must respond. As a state institution, we are charged with the particular mission of serving the needs of the region. These needs are real, and in many ways unique. I shall now describe briefly some of the ways in which we have attempted to respond to them, especially on the graduate level.

An article appeared in the 10 October issue of the Washington Post about George Mason's search for a new president (and if there are any potential candidates in the audience, it is not too late to apply), and in it the University was described in these terms:

> "Located on a 500-acre campus near Fairfax City, George Mason is a university of nearly 9,000 students and in many respects a study in contradictions and curiosities, heading in several different directions at the same time. Surrounded by acres of parking lots, it is the quintessential suburban commuter college, yet this fall it is opening dormitories on campus for the first time. It has as diverse a collection of students as any college in the Washington area and it attempts to cater to recent high school graduates, bureaucrats contemplating job changes at midcareer, and senior citizens. Fully 80 percent of the students work, the average age is 27 and for every student at George Mason there is an average of 2.3 academic transcripts from other colleges attended."

Some of my colleagues might think the Post's journalistic jesting presents an unfair caricature of our University. Perhaps so. But it is realistic enough to be recognizable in that it describes the diversity of the urban environment to which we are attempting to respond.

What, one might ask, are the responses we are making on the graduate level? First, we have introduced those master's programs most needed as fast as our limited state resources would permit. Graduate study was initiated at George Mason in 1970, a brief seven years ago (when the College was still a part of the University of Virginia), beginning with master's programs in Biology, Mathematics, and Elementary Education. Added to these in 1971 were programs in Secondary Education, School Administration, School Supervision, and History. In 1972, shortly after George Mason became an independent state university to serve the needs of Northern Virginia, the Graduate School came

into formal existence and, at that time, I became the first Dean of the Graduate School. From an initial graduate enrollment of 132, the annual growth rate has exceeded 20 percent each year, and now stands above 1200. These figures include only admitted graduate students. We also have another thousand or so postbaccalaureate enrollees taking courses through Extended Studies. The number of master's degrees conferred has shown a similar rate of growth, climbing from twenty-eight in 1971 to 307 in 1977.

In Roman mythology, the god Janus had two heads and could look forward and backward. At George Mason, we have had to do even more -- to look in all directions. To re-state the obvious, we are catering to a group of graduate students who are working full-time while studying part-time. We offer graduate programs primarily in the evening hours. We are providing opportunities for graduate work to citizens of all ages. We are serving the needs of those who want or have to commute to complete their graduate programs. All of these actions are considered non-traditional on many campuses. They are traditional with us.

One thing is certain about our graduate programs. We do not spend much time putting <u>old</u> wine in <u>old</u> bottles. It simply wouldn't work well in our environment. I am referring to such matters as residency requirements, thesis requirements, and full-time study requirements. But what is traditional in one place would be innovative in another. For example, I have tried to be innovative by encouraging departments to do what is traditional in many graduate schools -- offer some graduate courses <u>during the day</u> in order to serve the needs of the small, but growing number of students who wish to pursue full-time graduate study, including graduate assistants, foreign students, fellowship holders, and others who want to live on campus in our new residence halls.

A considerable part of our graduate effort does go into putting old wine in new bottles. I hasten to add that this is not necessarily good or bad. Professional degrees in particular have components which are dictated by external agencies (such as State Departments of Education) or which have come to be looked upon as "tried and true" ingredients necessary to a master's degree. There are, for instance, elements which are common to nearly all M.B.A. degrees. One will therefore find in many of our graduate programs a traditional core of courses.

Putting old wine in new bottles is, in marketing terms, a question of packaging. While we may give some traditional degree programs, we "package" them to accommodate the buyer, who is often the part-time student. The delicate task is to maintain both flexibility and integrity. In an urban environment such as ours, the increasing professionalization of the master's degree is a direct result of the increasing pressure from working professionals for additional credentials. For the most part, this group views the acquisition of a graduate degree as a key to a better life. Working professionals are concerned about security and advancement. They want graduate programs which offer the possibility of degree completion on a part-time basis, with all courses given after 5:00 P.M. or on weekends. It becomes of particular importance then for the graduate faculty to establish and adhere to a concept of a degree program in these instances, since the opportunity to accumulate credits according to what is available is accentuated for part-time students. Our geographical region is one with a high concentration of professionals who are finding it important to obtain a master's degree in order to advance professionally. Far from ignoring the educational needs of these vast numbers, some professors are happy to fill the bottle quickly, adding water for wine if the occasion demands. This is when the graduate dean must live up to his reputation as the academic conscience of the university and work in tandem with the graduate faculty or Graduate Council to uphold standards of quality, even though it may lead to frustration and annoyance on the part of some students or some faculty members.

This does not prevent however our reassessing traditional concepts or employing unconventional approaches. Putting new wine in new bottles is one of the exciting challenges of urban education today. We need not be afraid of the demand for new programs or for new modes of delivery in graduate study.

Let me close by citing a few random examples of what we are doing at George Mason in basically new directions. There are first of all new courses which caught across traditional disciplinary boundaries, some of which may be team-taught. We are introducing a new course in Psycholinguistics, for instance, which is being taught jointly by a Psychology professor and a professor of linguistics from the Department of English. We are developing plans for a master of science program in Cartography which will meet the needs of a wide gamut of professional geographers and cartographers in our area. As students, they will learn not only to direct research programs, but to evaluate the results for practical application.

We are using part-time faculty members as added assets, rather than as crutches. From the extraordinary array of professional experts living in the Metropolitan Washington area, we choose those most suited and needed to teach specialized graduate courses, inviting them to accept a part-time teaching assignment or to serve as guest lecturers. This brings a dimension and a richness to our graduate programs which we simply would not be able to provide through regular faculty members.

It is our conviction that urban education can provide the dynamics for progressive change in different directions at the same time. If the new programs of the future are well planned and well staffed, there need be no fear that graduate education will not continue to be quality education. I remain idealistic enough to believe that institutions in an urban environment such as ours will, through enlightened creation, respond to the diverse needs of those who seek meaningful educational opportunities to add value to their personal and professional lives.